**17 Foreign and Defense Policymaking**

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The United States and its allies believe that Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapon, and that a nuclear Iran would threaten world peace.

**What We Learned**

***1. Who are the political actors that make up the international community, and how does the United States pursue its foreign policy goals within that community?*** The nation-state is the basic unit of the international community. In addition to the governments of the world, more than a hundred transnational (or multinational) organizations are active on the international stage, including the United Nations (UN) and its various components, such as the WHO. Nongovernmental organization, including Greenpeace, International Red Cross, and even terror organizations, are important international political actors as well.

The United States has consistently pursued three foreign and defense policy goals throughout its history: national security, economic prosperity, and the projection of American values abroad. The United States pursues these goals through military, economic, cultural, and diplomatic means. In addition to the actual use of force, the United States forms defense alliances, promotes trade with other nations, uses foreign aid to win international backing, and engages in diplomacy.

***2. What is the history of American foreign and defense policy?*** For almost a century, the principle theme of American foreign policy was isolationism. After WWII, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was the dominant element of American foreign policy, as the two nations were locked in the Cold War from the late 1940s until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The collapse of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War and left the United States as the world’s only superpower. The events of 9/11 changed the environment for American foreign and defense policy by demonstrating that the United States is vulnerable to attack despite its status as the world’s sole superpower. The War on Terror raises a number of important issues for American policymakers, including controlling the spread of WMD, preventing failed states, limiting regional conflicts, dealing with rogue states, and fighting international terrorism.

***3. What are the two main ways in which America engages in world affairs, and what strategies does it utilize for national defense?*** American policymakers generally agree that the United States must be fully engaged in world affairs, but they disagree on how closely the United States should work with its allies and the other nations of the world. The George W. Bush administration followed a unilateralist approach to achieving its foreign policy goals, while the Obama administration has taken an internationalist approach.

America's defense strategy is based on strategic (nuclear) and conventional (non-nuclear) forces. In general, defense spending increases during wartime and falls during peacetime. Since 9/11, defense expenditures have increased as Congress and the president fund the War on Terror as well as military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Deterrence was the organizing principle of American defense policy during the Cold War, but it is an imperfect strategy today because of rogue states and, especially, terrorist organizations. Terrorists have no home country to be attacked in retaliation and may be willing to die for their cause.

***4. How is American foreign and defense policy made?*** International events are the most important environmental factors affecting foreign and defense policymaking. Events, public opinion, the media, interest groups, Congress, and the president all play a role in setting the agenda for foreign and defense policymaking. The president and Congress share constitutional authority to formulate and adopt foreign and defense policy. Presidents take the lead in foreign and defense policy legitimation. The executive branch is primarily responsible for the implementation of foreign policy. The government has no systematic, ongoing mechanism for evaluating foreign and defense policies. Finally, foreign and defense policies change because of changes in the policymaking environment and because of policy evaluation.

**Tips for Success**

**It’s not just about you:** Are you the first person in your family to go to college? If so, earning your degree will change your family tree by increasing the chances that your brothers and sisters and, eventually, your children go to college too.

**Key Terms**

**Cold War**

the period of international tension between the United States and the Soviet Union lasting from the late 1940s through the late 1980s

**Containment**

U.S. policy which sought to keep the Soviet Union from expanding its sphere of control and preserve the balance of power in Europe and Asia

**Conventional Forces**

non-nuclear forces

**Defense Policy**

public policy that concerns the armed forces of the United States

**Détente**

an era of improved relations between the Soviet Union and the United States

**Deterrence**

the ability of a nation to prevent an attack against itself or its allies by threat of massive retaliation

**Diplomatic Relations**

a system of official contacts between two nations in which the countries exchange ambassadors and other diplomatic personnel and operate embassies in each other’s country

**Failed States**

nation-states in which the government no longer effectively functions, threatening regional security and economies

**Foreign Policy**

public policy that concerns the relationship of the United States to the international political environment

**Internationalist**

an approach to foreign policy that supports working in close concert with the global community

**Isolationism**

the view that the United States should minimize its interactions with other nations

**Massive Retaliation**

the concept that the United States will strike back against an aggressor with overwhelming force

**Military Preemption**

the defense policy that declares that the United States will attack hostile nations or groups that represent a potential threat to the security of the United States

**Monroe Doctrine**

a declaration of American foreign policy opposing any European intervention in the Western Hemisphere and affirming the American intention to refrain from interfering in European affairs

**Mutual Assured Destruction (Mad)**

the belief that the United States and the Soviet Union would be deterred from launching a nuclear assault against each other for fear of being destroyed in a general nuclear war

**Nation-State**

a political community occupying a definite territory and having an organized government

**Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)**

international organizations committed to the promotion of a particular set of issues

**North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**

an international accord among the United States, Mexico, and Canada to lower trade barriers among the three nations

**North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

a regional military alliance consisting of the United States, Canada, and most of the European democracies

**Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty**

an international agreement designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons

**Postindustrial Societies**

nations whose economies are increasingly based on services, research, and information rather than heavy industry

**Rogue State**

a nation that threatens world peace by sponsoring international terrorism and promoting the spread of weapons of mass destruction

**Strategic Forces**

nuclear forces

**Unilateralist**

an approach to foreign policy that advocates acting in one’s own best interests, alone if necessary

**United Nations (UN)**

an international organization founded in 1945 as a diplomatic forum to resolve conflicts among the world’s nations

**Discussion Questions**

1. Should the United States refrain from military action if the United Nations Security Council does not grant approval? Is the UN still a useful forum for international dispute resolution?

2. What are the basic goals of U.S. foreign policy? What are the means through which the U.S. pursues its foreign policy goals?

3. How did America transition from a policy of isolationism to internationalism? What were America’s foreign and defense tactics during the Cold War?

4. What are the major issues the war on terror raises for American policymakers to address? What are the arguments for and against a unilateralist versus an internationalist approach to foreign policy?

5. What roles do Congress and the president play in American foreign and defense policymaking?

**Interactive Activity**

**Video: Obama Sanctions Iran**

Presidents of the United States have many tools at their disposal to address foreign policy concerns—ranging from the use of military force to diplomatic pressure. Sanctions, defined as actions by one or more states toward another state carefully calculated to force it to comply with legal obligations, are one such tool. In this video, President Obama is proposing new sanctions against Iran, a country with which the United States has not had formal diplomatic relations since the Islamic revolution of 1979 and the subsequent hostage crisis. President Obama, along with many in the international community, is concerned that Iran, a government that supports terrorist groups, is developing a nuclear weapons program. Can sanctions dissuade Iranian leaders from developing weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)? Are sanctions an effective foreign policy tool? If not, what course of action might prove more effective? In this activity you will consider these and other issues as you watch part of President Obama’s press conference explaining his decision to initiate sanctions.

[View Video](http://media.pearsoncmg.com/long/long_longman_media_1/2011_mpsl_video/ap_797735/player.html)

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Author Neal Tannahill discusses the most important concepts in this chapter

* [Deterrence and Military Preemption](http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/VPStreaming/audio.php?clipID=ab_amgov_think_tennahill/ch17_deterrence_preemption.mp3)
* [Rogue States](http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/VPStreaming/audio.php?clipID=ab_amgov_think_tennahill/ch17_rogue_states.mp3)